2001 Around the world, business class

Back then it was called internationalisation. Now we know it better as globalisation. But when Sir George Bain took over as Dean of London Business School in 1989 he knew that reaching out to the world was the only way to go. “Business schools are a reflection of business,” he says, “and business in the 1990s was becoming increasingly international. Unless business schools adapted themselves they were going to become increasingly irrelevant.”

Bain wanted to establish London Business School beyond the borders of Britain and he made the first links with Columbia Business School that led to the Executive MBA-Global Americas & Europe. Dina Dommett represented Columbia on the design committee for the EMBA-Global and she remembers there was a big appetite for the partnership: “In the 1990s we were experiencing, in New York, an onslaught of brilliant young bankers under 30, in pretty big jobs, who were used to working across these big cities,” she says. “They didn’t just want a global career, they were already global and they wanted to go further into different global markets.”

The ultimate luxury brand

In their first year these globally-minded students have monthly modules alternating between New York and London that are ‘long weekends’ of four or five days, designed to fit in with work. The second year they can take electives anywhere each school offers them. And they end up with a dual degree. The benefit for students is they get the best of both schools’ teaching styles and exposure to the different cultures they embody, says Dommett who moved to London Business School and is now the School’s Associate Dean, EMBA programmes.

The course met an early challenge when the World Trade Centre was attacked, but it survived the difficult times that followed. “I remember John Quelch when he was Dean (from 1997 to 2002) said the EMBA-Global is ‘the ultimate luxury brand, we need to make it exclusive, make it hard to find out about, and make the students really want it,’” says Dommett. “And that was good advice because 2001 was a tough year, September 11 hit everyone hard, but the programme stayed up and running.”

Global role

Laura Tyson says London Business School’s global reputation – boosted by its partnership with Columbia – was one of the things that attracted her to leave her native America to take the job of Dean in 2002, and also something she wanted to build on. A former Dean of the Haas School of Business at the University of California Berkeley, Tyson says she was impressed by the quality and diversity of faculty and students at London Business School and by its pioneering commitment to global business education. She believed that as the world economy became more interconnected, business leaders needed a global education.

“When I arrived at London Business School, a key question was whether the School needed a presence outside of London to maintain its leadership in global business education,” says Tyson who was the Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors under President Bill Clinton. “After all, London is a global city and the School was already attracting students, faculty and companies from all over the world. But I believed it should extend its global reach by launching programmes in other major international cities. Most of the world’s major business schools were thinking about whether to open programmes abroad and I didn’t want London Business School to lose its leadership position in global business education.”

Encouraged by faculty, members of the Governing Body, alumni and donors, the School began to explore major international locations for a new EMBA programme. Dubai, as one of the world’s fastest growing economies and a developing global financial centre with easy and frequent connections to and from London, emerged as the best first move. It was an attractive location to serve the growing number of students from the Middle East, India and throughout Asia who sought a London Business School education.

Different perspectives

The Dubai campus, based in Dubai’s International Finance Centre, was launched in 2007 and now has more than 100 graduates a year. Professor Andrew Scott teaches the global economy course in Dubai and says the classroom there is wonderfully chaotic: “The debate and the questions come tumbling out and there’s a speed and enthusiasm that you might expect from a place like that where there’s a hunger for growth. I also think being in Dubai has helped us as a business school to add a more global dimension, not just by reaching more people but also by creating more awareness of different perspectives.”

If the Columbia partnership was bold, then going it alone in Dubai was even bolder. But again the venture has stood up to early challenges. “The 2008 financial crisis could have sent us packing,” says Dommett who worked on setting up the project in Dubai. “Other schools left, I’m sure our enrolments...
must have dipped, but if you can start well it helps, and we had a first mover advantage in Dubai.”

**Next stop Asia**

Tyson also set in motion the School’s next international move – a partnership with Columbia and Hong Kong University to launch the EMBA-Global Asia, which opened in 2008. “I knew it was essential to have an EMBA programme in Asia and it made sense to partner” says Tyson. “Hong Kong University is one of the oldest universities in the region, it’s highly regarded, and when you work with a strong partner you know you’re going to attract top students, faculty and businesses.”

The School’s outward reach has continued and in 2014 it announced a new Global Masters in Management (MiM) in partnership with China’s Fudan University in Shanghai, with the first intake in September 2015. It’s very much a joint operation with the first year taught in English in London and the second year in Mandarin at Fudan. Each school will recruit half the class and at the end students will get two masters, one from LBS and one from Fudan.

“The biggest story of our lifetime is the emergence of China as an economic force,” says Scott, who’s also Deputy Dean (Programmes). “We are a global school and want to have a profound impact on the way the world does business; we can’t do that unless we properly engage with China.

**Global trends**

“China will have a huge need for management training and expertise as its economy grows and matures so it’s great to start at the youngest level with the MiM and know we’ll be training China’s elite who in five, ten and 15 years’ time will be running major corporations in China.”

Over the past 13 years the School has extended its global footprint in an extraordinary way, reflecting the School’s early vision of internationalisation that has become a defining feature of its leadership in global business education.